

HOME & GARDEN INFORMATION CENTER

Japanese Cryptomeria

Japanese cryptomeria (*Cryptomeria japonica*), or Japanese cedar, is a splendid evergreen that becomes even more handsome as it matures. Although it is not as well-suited to the United States as to its native Japan, it is still an excellent tree for the Southeast. It is adapted to the entire state of South Carolina.



'Yoshino' Japanese cryptomeria
Karen Russ, ©HGIC, Clemson Extension

Mature Height/Spread

The tree will grow 50 to 80 feet tall and 20 to 30 feet wide. Heights of 100 to 125 feet are not uncommon.

Growth Rate

The growth rate is slow to medium (20 feet in 20 years). The tree is long-lived (there are specimens in Japan that are about 650 years old).

Ornamental Features

The Japanese cedar is pyramidal when young, but at maturity the crown opens to an irregular, narrow oval form. The straight, tapered trunk, which may develop to 3 feet in diameter, supports wide-spreading branches with drooping branchlets. Branches of mature specimens will droop to the ground. The reddish-brown bark peels off in long strips, and is attractive in all seasons. The short (½ inch), glossy blue-green needles are spirally arranged, clasping the shoots and pointing toward the end of the stems, creating a "foxtail" effect. The foliage turns bronze in winter.



Drooping branchlets of Japanese cryptomeria
Karen Russ, ©HGIC, Clemson Extension

Landscape Use

The Japanese cedar is a handsome specimen for windscreens, borders and groupings on large properties. It works well as a lawn specimen on smaller properties because of its narrow canopy and relatively slow growth rate.

The ideal planting site is in moist, acidic, well-drained soil. Although it is moderately adaptable to dry sites, it needs irrigation during drought. While it prefers full sun, it tolerates partial shade. The site should have good air circulation to help prevent disease but should not be exposed to high winds.

Pest Problems

Problems that may occur are mites that infest foliage and foliage burn in winter.

Cultivars

- 'Yoshino' - This handsome tree holds green foliage in winter. It is fast growing (2 to 3 feet per year) and may be more resistant to leaf blight. It will grow 30 to 40 feet tall.
- 'Elegans' - This dense, bushy cultivar grows 15 to 25 feet tall. It is less hardy than the species.

- 'Globosa Nana' - This mounded and compact selection grows 3 to 4 feet tall and 3 feet wide. It has dark green needles.
- 'Lobbii' - This tree is hardier and slightly smaller than the species. It is denser and more compact. It will grow 20 to 40 feet tall. The foliage bronzes in winter. This is a good selection for the South.

Note: Chemical control of diseases and insects on large trees is usually not feasible since adequate coverage of the foliage with a pesticide cannot be achieved.

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